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30 January 1958Validity Study of NIE 11-4-56:Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through 1961,published 2 August 1956

1. Since this estimate covered a five-year period, it is premature to assess the validity of many of its judgments. Viewed in an eighteen-month perspective, however, the estimate's major judgments concerning Soviet capabilities and policies appear to have been sound. In particular, it correctly stressed even more than the preceding Soviet estimates the flexibility of the post-Stalin regime and the broad lines of Soviet external policy. On the other hand, some of its specific appraisals have had to be revised in producing NIE 11-4-57, and other possible developments were insufficiently emphasized or not anticipated.

2. Internal Political Developments. NIE 11-4-56 was properly skeptical of the stability of the top leadership. It did not anticipate that aspect of the power struggle which involved the Party's reassertion of its ascendancy over other elite groups, but it did point to continuing factional divisions, personal intrigues, and policy disputes. The conclusion that any struggle for power would be resolved without violence or a weakening of regime control also appears validated by the outcome of the 1957 purges.

3. Most of the judgments concerning other internal political matters still appear to be sound. The estimate did not stress, however, the growth of critical thinking and disaffection among Soviet students and the intelligentsia, which more recent evidence indicates has been taking place.

4. Economic Developments. Primarily because the targets of the Sixth Five-Year Plan were generally regarded as feasible, NIE 11-4-56 revised upward the rate of economic growth foreseen in its predecessor, NIE 11-3-55. In the light of the abandonment of the Sixth Five-Year Plan and the relatively modest goals set for 1957 and 1958 this upward revision appears to have been too high, as was also the projection of industrial growth. NIE 11-4-56 also failed to predict that a somewhat higher priority would be given to consumption programs.

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Approved For Release 2004/03/23 : CIA-RDP82-00400R000300100022-9

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5. Bloc Developments. The estimate clearly erred in predicting that the transition to a new post-Stalin policy in Eastern Europe could be completed "without serious disruption." This mistake arose primarily from a failure to appreciate the growth and significance of disunity and conflicting loyalties within the Polish and Hungarian Communist parties. The aims of post-Stalin Satellite policy, however, were correctly appreciated, as was Communist willingness to abandon liberalization if it produced a fundamental challenge to the Communist regimes. While the basic unifying factors in the Sino-Soviet alliance were properly appraised, little attention was paid to the increasing stature of Communist China within the Bloc; on this point NIE 11-3-55 was a more useful estimate.

6. Foreign Policy. The judgment that "peaceful coexistence" would continue to characterize the Soviet approach to foreign affairs appears to have been a valid one. The estimate correctly described the use of the peace and anti-colonialism campaigns and of traditional methods of diplomacy, and Soviet stress on the underdeveloped and uncommitted areas. Its judgments of the Soviet position on Germany and disarmament have been borne out. NIE 11-4-56 did not, however, fully anticipate Soviet concentration upon the Middle East in 1957, and too great a weight may have been given to Soviet respect for the vital nature of Western interests in that area. Finally, NIE 11-4-56 did not foresee the extent to which Soviet technological achievements would bolster Soviet self-confidence and perhaps lead to more venturesome policies.

7. Military and Scientific. The validity of many of the estimates made in the military chapters of NIE 11-4-56 cannot be adequately tested at this time. The broad picture of Soviet military strengths and capabilities presented in NIE 11-4-56 appears to have been generally valid. However, on the basis of evidence accumulated over the intervening months, several important projections appear to have been in error: (a) NIE 11-4-56 projected a more rapid Soviet buildup in heavy bombers than we now believe has actually occurred, and somewhat underestimated the number of jet medium bombers the USSR would add to its forces; (b) the

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estimate predicted a much higher rate of long-range, conventional submarine construction for 1957 and after than actually occurred; (c) subsequent evidence indicates that the performance characteristics of certain Soviet long-range bomber types were somewhat overestimated; and (d) new evidence leads to the conclusion that the USSR is probably developing an IRBM of somewhat shorter range than estimated in NIE 11-4-56, and that it as well as the first Soviet operational ICBM probably will be available earlier than previously estimated. So far as concerns manpower strengths, we now tend to believe that the bulk of the reductions from Korean War peaks probably largely preceded rather than followed the announcements of 1955 and 1956. In any event, we believe that Soviet military manpower strengths have over the past decade varied considerably more than indicated in previous estimates.